

PROTECT IMPORTANT RESOURCES

4

Overview

Much of Stonington's character and high quality of life is derived from its unique combination of natural, historic, coastal and scenic resources.

By protecting these important resources and guiding future development, Stonington can maintain and enhance community character and quality of life for generations to come.

Protecting important resources is a critical element in maintaining community character and ensuring quality of life for current and future generations.

Open Space



Natural Resources



Historic Resources



Scenic Resources



Preserving open space was a primary concern of Stonington residents and is a high priority in the Plan.

Blueways

Blueways are recreational water trails accessible by small boats such as canoes and kayaks.

Detention / Retention Basins

Stonington currently accepts stormwater detention / retention basins as mandatory open space in new subdivisions. While Stonington may wish to continue to accept these facilities, their value as open space is questionable since they rarely achieve common open space goals.

As the most responsible party to maintain them, Stonington should continue to accept these stormwater facilities, but they should not be used to defray the requirement for mandatory open space.

Preserve Open Space

Preserving meaningful open space will help conserve important natural resources, protect wildlife habitat, create more environmentally sensitive development patterns, provide fiscal benefits, protect community character and enhance the quality of life for Stonington residents.

The main open space strategies include:

- preserving more open space;
- preserving meaningful open space and connecting open spaces into a system of greenways and “blueways” (water trails);
- obtaining coastal open space; and
- forming a Stonington Land Trust.

Preserve More Open Space

For Stonington to protect and enhance community character and quality of life, attention must be paid to preserving more open space. This can be done through regulation (such as a ‘set-aside’ as part of new residential development) or through donation or purchase of land. Both strategies will need to be pursued for Stonington to preserve the open space that it wants.

Regulatory Approaches

In terms of regulation, it is recommended that Stonington increase the mandatory open space “set-aside” from 15% to 20% of every residential subdivision application. The Conservation Commission can work cooperatively with the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) to help identify the most appropriate open space within each development.

To ensure the quality of mandatory open space set-asides in subdivisions, Stonington should require that the amount of wetlands, watercourses, floodplains and steep slopes within the open space be proportional to the amount of these constrained areas within the overall development. The PZC should retain the ability to waive this requirement when taking a higher proportion of constrained land would achieve a desirable open space goal such as providing a critical greenway or wildlife corridor link.

Some communities also permit greater development flexibility in return for preserving open space above and beyond any mandatory set-aside. Stonington may wish to consider a similar regulation.

Some communities require ‘open space development patterns’ that result in a higher percentage of open space preservation and require a special permit for ‘conventional subdivisions.’ Such an approach might be particularly appropriate in coastal and northern areas of Stonington. Stonington should consider a similar regulation in conjunction with modifications to the coverage/bulk requirements to permit the prevailing large-footprint home on smaller conservation subdivision lots (see page 76 for additional discussion of open space development patterns).

When there is no appropriate open space within a new subdivision, the PZC should accept an off-site dedication of open space and the subdivision regulations should be modified to allow for this possibility. A variation on off-site dedication might be ‘open space banking’ in which the Town would purchase desirable open space and allow developers to gradually pay down the purchase as they develop parcels of land elsewhere in Town.

If there is still no appropriate open space offered as part of an application, the PZC should accept a ‘fee in lieu of open space’ equal to 10% of the fair-market value of the undeveloped parcel(s) (as currently authorized in the subdivision regulations) to be used to purchase open space elsewhere in Town. Fees must be placed in the Town’s dedicated open space fund.

Transfer of development rights is yet another regulatory option that preserves open space by allowing the transfer of ‘development rights’ to another parcel, better suited for development. Transfer of development rights is explained in greater detail in Chapter 6.

In any event, the Planning and Zoning Commission should obtain desirable open space or a fee-in-lieu-of open space as part of every residential subdivision, regardless of size.

Acquisition Approaches

For Stonington to be able to preserve the open space parcels that are most important, the community must be prepared to purchase some properties and/or work with property owners for a full or partial donation of the land as open space.

The Town should finance the dedicated open space fund on an annual basis. In this way, funds will be available when needed to purchase important properties either before or when they come on the market.

Even better, the Town may wish to consider an open space bond where funds can be immediately obtained (and paid back over time) to allow the purchase of open space whenever it becomes available. Several communities (including Groton) have done this and used the funds to acquire important open space properties.

Open space preservation does not always have to mean purchase of an entire property. Some communities have purchased ‘development rights’ to reduce the amount of development on sensitive parcels or preserve meaningful open space. Some other communities have used this type of approach to preserve agricultural land. Land can also be purchased outright today and be paid for through a ‘reverse mortgage’, leased back to an owner, or an owner can be granted ‘life use’ of the property.

Donating land or development rights can also be an effective estate planning tool. Many property owners have an emotional attachment to their land and given a choice, would prefer to see their property preserved in a way that enhances the community rather than be developed. The active solicitation of open space donations (land, development rights and easements) is an increasingly popular and successful open space tool that should be promoted in Stonington.

What Is Open Space?

While most people think of “open space” as land that is not built upon, the Plan defines open space as land that is preserved as open space.

Open space preserved in adequate quantities and appropriate locations, conserves important natural resources, shapes development patterns, and maintains quality of life.

And the survey says...

- 61% of residents think that Stonington should preserve more open space.
- 77% agree that open space set-asides should be required for all new subdivisions.
- 56% of residents would be willing to pay \$50 or more per year in taxes to purchase more open space.

Fiscal Benefits

Several studies have shown that purchasing open space can be fiscally responsible over time when compared to the perpetual costs and benefits of residential development that might otherwise occur.

For this reason, the Town may wish to enhance the open space fund with annual Town contributions or to create a more effective open space fund that can be used to immediately purchase significant open space, consider bonding for open space acquisition.

When adequately funded, the land acquisition fund can be used to leverage matching open space grants, making local funds twice as effective.

And the survey says...

- 78% agree that open spaces should be connected into a system of greenways.
- 63% agree that the Town should acquire waterfront property for a Town beach.

Open Space Inventory

An Open Space Subcommittee of the Conservation Commission is in the process of inventorying existing open space and desirable open space acquisitions. If the subcommittee completes their work prior to adoption of the Plan, their work will be incorporated into the Plan.

Preserve Meaningful Open Space and Create a Greenway System

Open spaces are more meaningful when they contribute to an overall open space system, enhance existing open space, provide access to coastal resources, or protect important natural or scenic resources.

Overall Open Space System

Interconnecting open spaces with greenways is the most effective way for Stonington to establish a meaningful open space system that provides benefits for both passive recreation and wildlife. A system of greenways can function as wildlife corridors, allowing wildlife to migrate between larger open space habitats. By connecting to the villages, the Borough, museums and attractions, and other outlying activity nodes, a trail system within the greenways can not only provide passive recreation but can also reduce dependency on automobiles.

Greenway programs on both the Mystic and Pawcatuck Rivers would be desirable. The Pawcatuck River Greenway could link Pawcatuck with Westerly, RI via a pedestrian bridge between the two sister villages.

In order for the system of greenways to be most effective, the Town should: encourage other open space organizations to allow public access; secure easements over private property when necessary (especially along the Mystic and Pawcatuck Rivers); and encourage the creation of recreational waterways or “blueways”, such as kayak trails, that interconnect with greenways and open spaces. The greenway system should also tie into regional trails wherever practical.

Enhance Existing Open Space

When opportunities arise to acquire open space adjacent to existing preserved lands, they should be given strong consideration. The value of the existing open space will be enhanced through such strategic expansions, and the overall utility of the open space system for passive use and wildlife habitat will be enhanced.

Coastal Open Space

Coastal resources play an important role in the history, economy and character of Stonington. Acquisitions should be prioritized based on critical resource protection and recreational potential (e.g., bathing beach). Priorities should include: obtaining privately owned beach property (if and when available) to create a Town beach and obtaining coastal access with appropriate public access signage as a condition of any development approval in coastal areas.

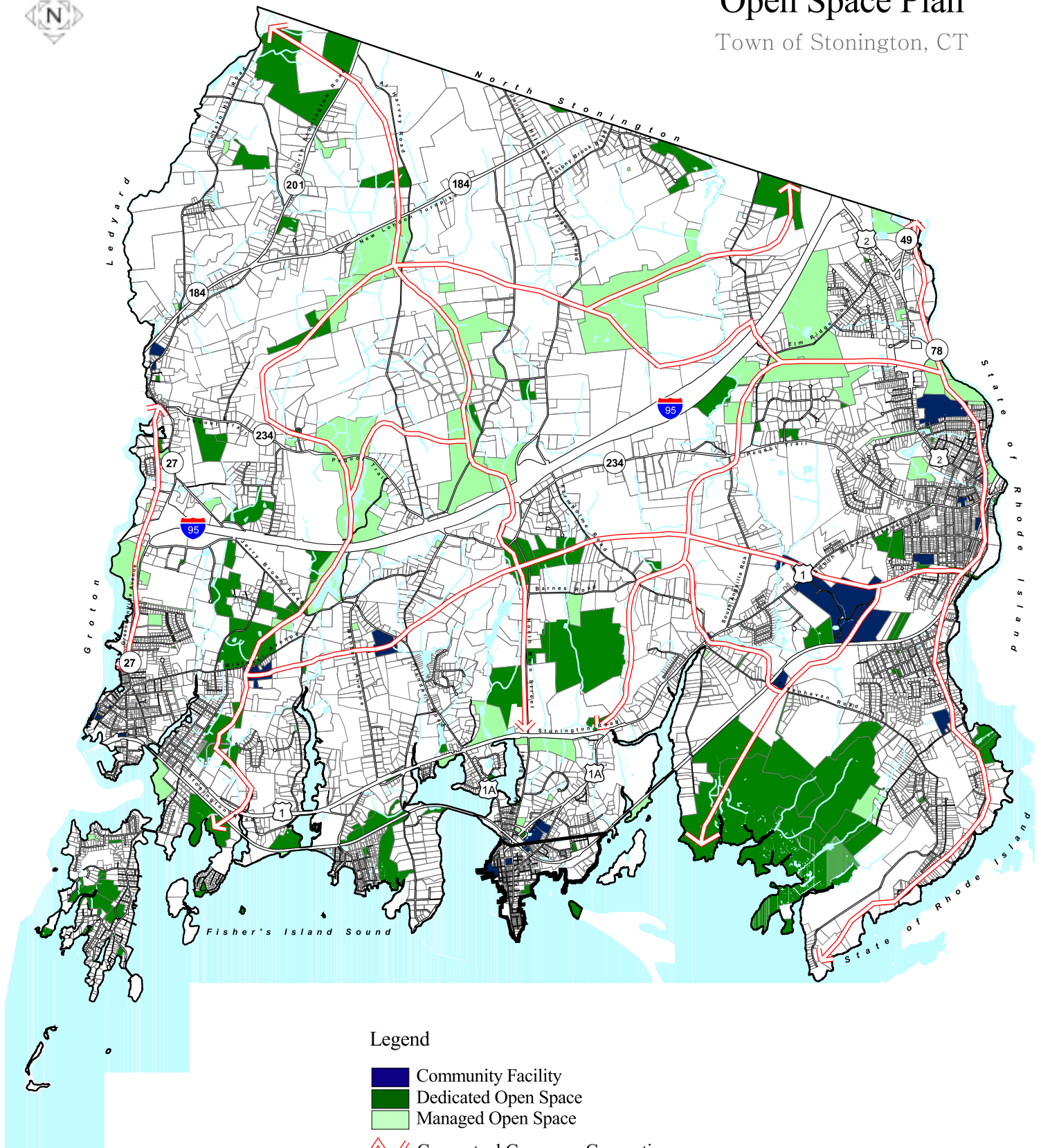
Protect Important Resources

Open space is a significant tool for preserving natural and scenic resources. While acquisition of the land might provide the greatest benefits, preservation of the natural or scenic resource might also be accomplished through the use of conservation easements.








Open Space Plan

Town of Stonington, CT



Legend

-  Community Facility
-  Dedicated Open Space
-  Managed Open Space
-  Conceptual Greenway Connections
-  Stonington Borough

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The PZC and Inland Wetlands Commission (IWC) can require conservation easements to protect important resources during the application review process.

Investigate Formation of a Stonington Land Trust

Land trusts are important open space organizations since they can devote far more time, energy and resources towards open space preservation than a municipality can.

While the Avalonia Land Conservancy (ALC) has done an exemplary job of preserving open space in Stonington, their focus is regional in scope. If a critical open space opportunity presents itself in Stonington and the ALC has committed its resources towards another parcel in the region, the opportunity may be lost.

An independent, non-profit Stonington Land Trust would complement the ALC's continued efforts by focusing on preserving important open space in Stonington while working cooperatively with the ALC.

Barn Island Wildlife Management Area



Greenway Trails



Wildlife Habitat



Coastal Islands



Open Space Preservation Strategies

Preserve More Open Space

1. Increase the mandatory open space "set-aside" to 20%.
2. Require open space for every residential development application or accept a fee-in-lieu equal to 10% of the predevelopment value of the parcel(s).
3. Require the amount of constrained land within an open space set-aside to be proportional to the amount of constrained land within the overall development, unless waived by the PZC for good cause.
4. Enhance the open space acquisition fund through annual contributions in the budget and/or by bonding to have a more immediate effect.
5. Continue to pursue state and/or federal open space grants.
6. Convert unprotected and perceived open space into protected open space by acquiring land or easements.
7. Investigate adopting density-based zoning to encourage open space subdivisions.
8. Investigate adopting regulations to allow development flexibility for open space preservation.
9. Require conservation easements or other measures during approvals.
10. Investigate allowing off-site dedication and/or banking of open space.
11. Investigate *requiring* "open space developments" resulting in higher percentage of open space.
12. Educate residents about benefits of open space donation and sale of development rights.

Preserve Meaningful Open Space and Create a Greenway System

13. Interconnect open spaces into a system of local and regional greenways.
14. Establish trails along greenways and tie into regional trails to encourage passive recreation.
15. Encourage other organizations to allow for public access and use.
16. Prioritize coastal open space acquisition by critical resource protection and recreational potential (e.g., town beach).
17. Acquire an appropriate public beach property.

Investigate Formation of a Stonington Land Trust

18. Investigate creating a Stonington Land Trust.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 6 contains additional strategies that may result in additional, more desirable open space.

Chapter 5 and Chapter 7 contain additional strategies for creating a system of greenways.

Protecting natural resources is important to enhancing community character and the overall quality of life in Stonington.

Protect Important Natural Resources

Conserving natural resources is important in terms of preserving environmental functions, maintaining biodiversity and preventing environmental damage.

Despite the fact that nearly three-quarters of residents surveyed agree that the Town is doing a good job protecting natural resources, there are some ways that Stonington can enhance protection of natural resources:

- address natural resources at the time of development;
- strengthen wetland and watercourse setbacks; and
- preserve natural diversity.

Address Natural Resources at the Time of Development

The main pressure on natural resources is from human activity, particularly development activity. When natural resources are not fully considered at the time of development, there can be irreversible impacts on natural functions. Buildable land regulations and/or soil-based zoning can address these issues.

Adopt a Buildable Land Regulation

To relate development potential to the capability of the land, Stonington should adopt a buildable land regulation that excludes sensitive areas such as wetlands, watercourses, floodplains and steep slopes (>25%) from the overall acreage of the parcel when determining the overall density within a residential development.

Consider Soil-Based Zoning

Soil-based zoning is a tool used by some communities to relate residential development to the underlying capabilities of the soils. Naturally, such an approach is most appropriate in areas that rely on soil characteristics to support the wells and septic systems that are a major part of residential development in certain areas of Stonington (it would not be relevant to areas served by public water and sewer).

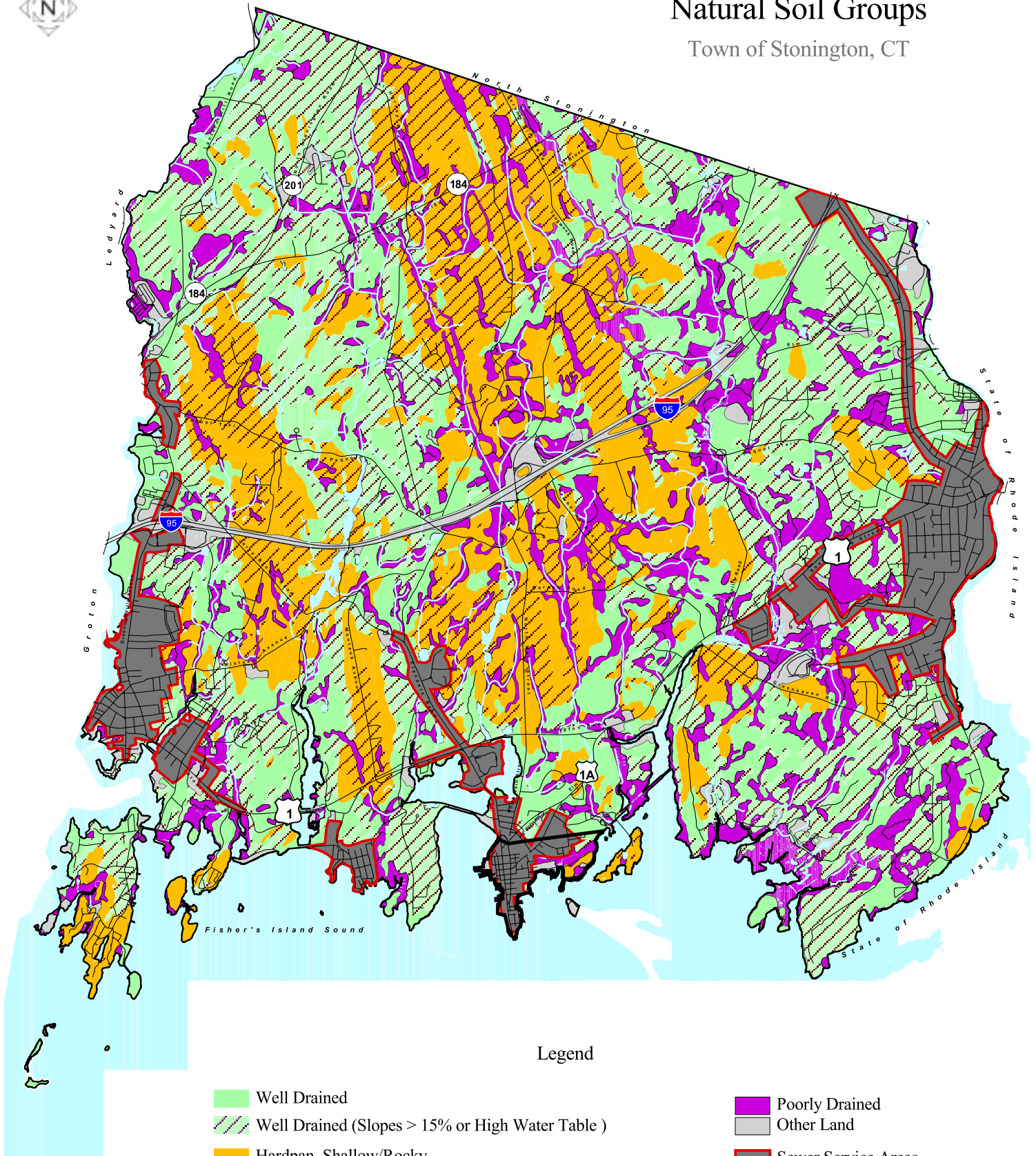
Natural soils groups are described below and illustrated on the following map.

Development Potential	Natural Soil Group	Description
Good	Well Drained	Generally well drained soils.
	Well Drained (slopes >15% or high water table)	Generally well drained soils.
Fair	Hardpan, shallow/rocky	Restricted drainage is a constraint
	Shallow and Rocky (slopes >15% or high water table)	Presence of rock is a constraint.
Poor	Poorly Drained (Wetlands)	Poor drainage or flooding is a constraint
Varies	Other Land	Soil types are not discernible.



Natural Soil Groups

Town of Stonington, CT



Legend

- Well Drained
- Well Drained (Slopes > 15% or High Water Table)
- Hardpan, Shallow/Rocky
- Hardpan, Shallow/Rocky (Slopes > 15% or High Water Table)

- Poorly Drained
- Other Land
- Sewer Service Areas
- Stonington Borough

0 4000 Feet

Important Habitats

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) maintains a Natural Diversity Database (NDDDB) that identifies areas where species of concern that are threatened or endangered may exist within Stonington.

When development proposals occur in these areas (depicted on the Conservation Plan on the facing page), applicants should work closely with Town and DEP staff to mitigate any impacts on the species of concern and its habitat.

Strengthen Wetland and Watercourse Setbacks

While the Inland Wetlands Commission (IWC) has a policy of an ‘upland review area’ of 100 feet adjacent to inland wetlands and watercourses, this is not a regulation. In addition, the Planning and Zoning Commission has a ‘non-infringement area’ standard in the GBR-130 and RC-120 zones which applies to both inland and coastal wetlands. These standards should be both simplified and strengthened.

The Inland Wetlands Commission (IWC) should formally adopt a regulation or definition establishing an upland review area within 100’ of a wetland or watercourse. Some consideration must be given to continuing to make exceptions for boating facilities and other water dependent uses with proper permits in the RC-120 and other zones.

The Planning and Zoning Commission should expand the requirement of the non-infringement area for coastal wetlands in the RC-120 Zone to include other appropriate zones within coastal areas but eliminate the requirement in the GBR-130 Zone in favor of the IWC’s upland review area.

Preserve Natural Diversity

With 55 percent of the Town preserved as open space or remaining undeveloped, large tracts of wildlife habitat exist in Stonington. However, many of these areas may be developed in the future, threatening wildlife habitat. Consideration should be given to preserving additional wildlife habitat and migration corridors in the future. This is especially true for rare or endangered species (see sidebar).

A simple measure of added protection for preserving the natural ecosystem is to prohibit the deliberate introduction of harmful non-native or invasive species during the site development or subdivision process. Invasive plant and animal species can aggressively multiply; replacing native wildlife food sources, causing costly property damage and even threatening human health and safety.

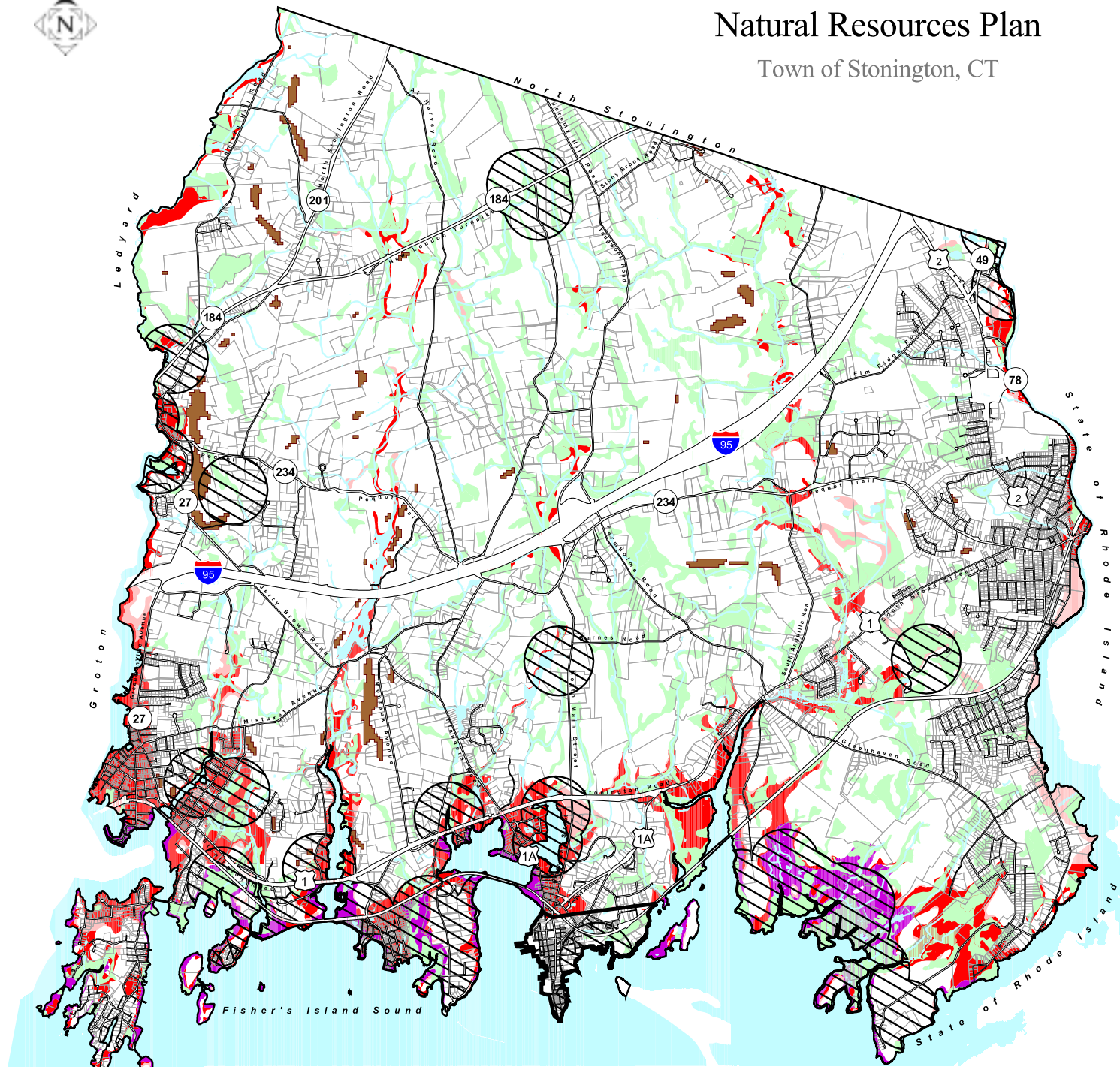
Important Natural Resource Protection Strategies

1. Adopt buildable land regulations to reduce development pressure on sensitive areas.
2. Consider adopting soil-based zoning to relate density of development to the capability of soils to support development.
3. Work with applicants to ensure that important Natural Diversity Database (NDDDB) resources are protected.
4. Minimize wildlife habitat loss through the preservation of open space and natural resource areas
5. Adopt buffer areas to wetlands and watercourses and eliminate conflict between buffers and non-infringement areas.
6. Prohibit the introduction of non-native or invasive species during the site development or subdivision process.










Natural Resources Plan

Town of Stonington, CT



Legend

- | | |
|---|---|
|  Wetland |  Natural Diversity Database Area |
|  100-year floodplain |  Slopes > 15% |
|  Coastal Floodzone |  Water |
|  500-year floodplain |  Stonington Borough |

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Protection of water quality may be Stonington's most important natural resource protection priority.

Important Water Resources

The water quality categories shown on the following page are described as follows:

Aquifer Protection Area – a DEP designated area intended to protect public water supply wells;

Aquifer Protection Zone – an overlay zone intended to protect aquifers and public water supply watersheds;

Areas of High Groundwater Availability – aquifers and other areas thought capable of supplying significant volumes of water for private and public use;

Meets State water quality standards – surface water that is acceptable for all uses except certain discharges;

Not meeting State water quality standards – surface water that is not acceptable for some uses (ex. potability or recreation);

Not Potable – groundwater that is known to be undrinkable due to pollution;

Potable (may not meet State water quality standards) – groundwater that may be affected by pollution;

Shellfishing restrictions apply – surface water that is acceptable for most uses except that shellfish must be purified before being consumed; and

Water Quality Event – the location of a documented water pollution incident.

Protect Water Quality

Protecting water quality may be the top priority for natural resource protection in Stonington. Stonington's surface and groundwater resources provide potable water, contribute to biological diversity, support water dependent uses and add to the overall quality of life for residents.

While Stonington already has an Aquifer Protection Zone (APZ), it only applies to two aquifer areas and the Copps Brook watershed feeding the Mystic Reservoir. Stonington contains other areas that might be categorized into the following water resource protection areas:

- Level A Aquifer Protection Areas (APA)- areas known to supply existing public drinking wells,
- public water supply watersheds - where water drains to a public drinking water reservoir,
- Level B APAs - thought to supply existing public drinking wells or with the potential for new wells,
- high groundwater availability areas - thought capable of supplying significant volumes of water for private and public use, or
- watersheds with aquifers or other high groundwater availability areas - areas thought capable of supporting public wells.

The Aquifer Protection Zone should be modified to prescribe uses according to their potential risk to these water resource protection areas. The following table ranks land uses from lowest to highest risk for polluting water resources and makes recommendations for their use in the water resource protection areas described above.

Recommendations for New Uses in Water Resource Protection Areas

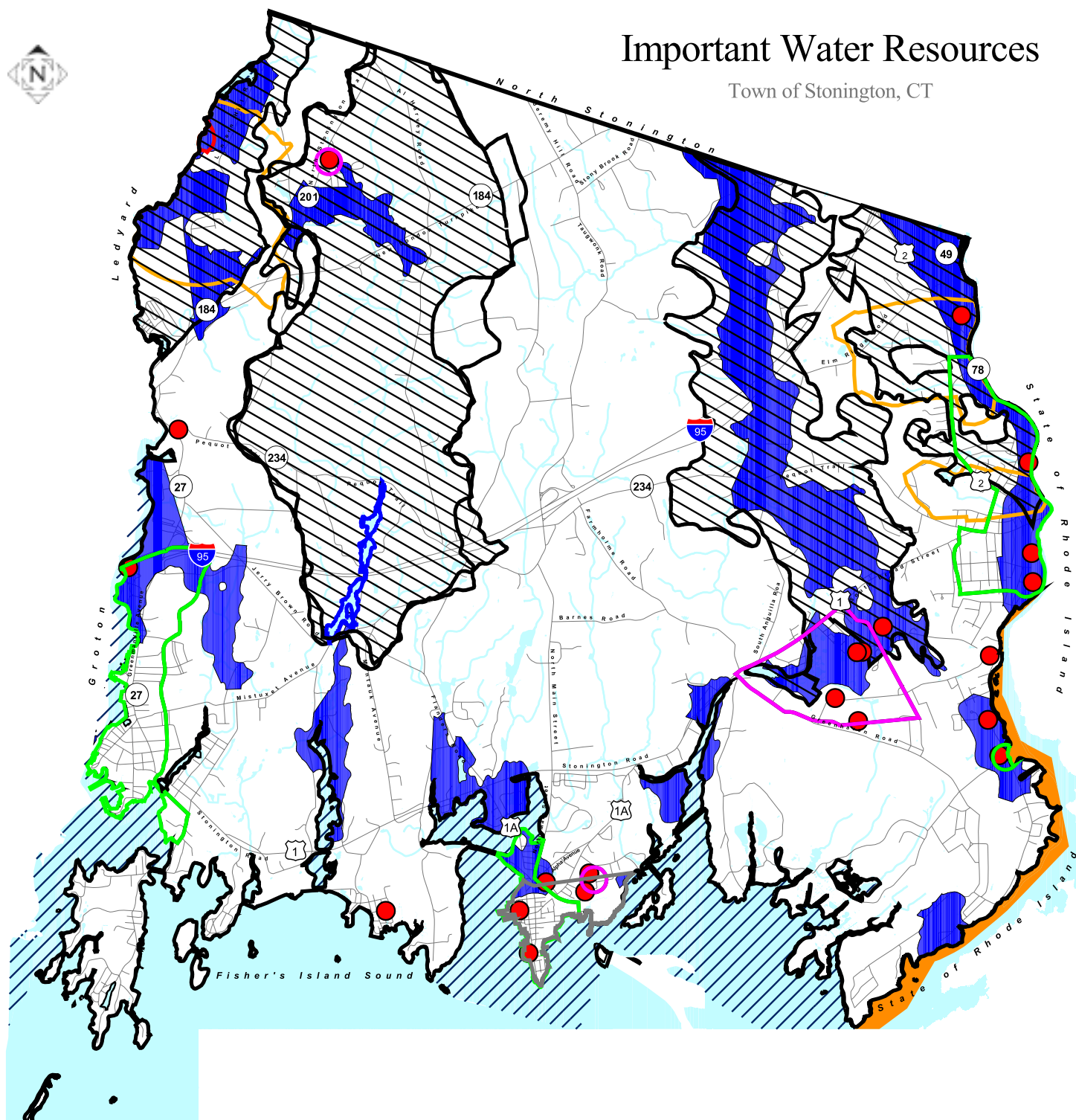
Use	Recommendation
1. Open space and passive recreation 2. Forests / land for forest products 3. Developed recreation, public parks	Can be permitted anywhere
4. Field crops or permanent pasture 5. Low density residential (<1 units/acre) 6. Churches, municipal offices	Can be permitted anywhere
7. Agricultural - dairy, livestock, poultry, nursery, tobacco, orchards	Best management practices recommended.
8. Medium density residential (1 to 2 units/acre) 9. Golf course	Conditionally permitted in all water resource protection areas except only in Level A APAs upon adherence to best management practices and connection to public sewers where applicable.
10. High density housing (>2 units/acre) 11. Commercial - with nothing more than domestic sewage discharges 12. Schools, hospitals, nursing homes	Conditionally permitted in all areas upon adherence to best management practices and connection to public sewer.
13. Other Retail / Commercial 14. Manufacturing, processing, research 15. Waste lagoons, bulky waste landfills 16. Cemeteries	Prohibited in Level A and B APAs, public water supply watersheds and designated high groundwater availability areas. Conditionally permitted elsewhere upon adherence to best management practices and connection to public sewers where applicable.

Use risk factor information from Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection



Important Water Resources

Town of Stonington, CT



- Groundwater**
- Areas of High Groundwater Availability
 - Aquifer Protection Zone (Town)
 - Aquifer Protection Area (DEP Level A)
 - Aquifer Protection Area (DEP Level B)
 - Potable
 - Potable (May Not Meet State Water Quality Standards)
 - Not Potable
 - Water Quality Events

- Surface Water**
- Reservoir
 - Meets State Water Quality Standards
 - Shellfishing Restrictions Apply
 - Not Meeting State Water Quality Standards
 - Stonington Borough

0 4000 Feet



Planimetrics
31 Edge Drive, Avon, CT 06001 800-671-5207

According to Aquifer Protection Regulations proposed by the Department of Environmental Protection (Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies - Section 22a-354i-9. Best Management Practices for Regulated Activities), best management practices for sensitive water resource areas include:

1. Every regulated activity shall be conducted in accordance with the following:
 - a. Hazardous materials may be stored above ground within an aquifer protection area only in accordance with certain conditions.
 - b. No person shall increase the number of underground storage tanks used to store hazardous materials.
 - c. An underground storage tank used to store hazardous materials shall not be replaced with a larger tank except under certain conditions.
 - d. No person shall use, maintain or install floor drains, dry wells or other infiltration devices or appurtenances which allow the release of waste waters to the ground, without specific approval.
 - e. A materials management plan shall be developed and implemented in accordance specified criteria and standards.
2. The development and implementation of a storm water management plan shall be required for regulated activities, as follows:
 - a. A storm water management plan shall assure that storm water run-off generated by the subject regulated activity is (i) managed in a manner so as to prevent pollution of ground water, and (ii) shall comply with all of the requirements for the General Permit of the Discharge of Storm Water associated with a Commercial Activity issued pursuant to section 22a-430b of the Connecticut General Statutes; and
 - b. Upon approval by the Commissioner or the municipal aquifer protection agency, as appropriate, the storm water management plan shall be enforceable by the Commissioner or such agency, as appropriate.

Reduce Impervious Coverage

The HI-200 Zone is currently the only zone with impervious coverage regulations which require at least 40% of a development to remain in a landscaped or natural vegetative state to reduce runoff and promote groundwater infiltration. The HI-200 zone and other commercial and industrial zones should be amended to include flexible “effective impervious coverage” requirements that take into account such measures as roof leaders that allow clean water from building roofs to infiltrate the ground or porous paving materials that allow a portion of stormwater to infiltrate the ground. Effective impervious coverage requirements should be tailored to the characteristics of each zone (i.e. stronger in environmentally sensitive areas such as the aquifer protection zone and relaxed in historically dense developed areas such as the villages).

Other methods of protecting water quality throughout Stonington include:

- reducing residential density and/or lot coverage in sensitive watersheds;
- adopting an underground storage tank program or ordinance to monitor; regulate or prohibit underground fuel oil storage tanks;
- improving stormwater treatment by natural or mechanical means; and
- continuing to provide water quality educational resources to land use commissions and the public.

Address Stormwater Management

Dispersed or “non-point” sources of pollution such as road runoff, pesticides and fertilizers can be harmful when collected, concentrated and discharged into waterways. In the past, the discharge of stormwater was treated like a free good and discharged into a roadway storm drain system or detention pond and forgotten. Under the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) new National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Phase II guidelines, Stonington will be responsible for reducing the discharge of pollutants to the “maximum extent practical” through the implementation of a series of “minimum control measures” and “best management practices”.

Although no water monitoring is mandated, the Town and commercial properties tying into its system will be responsible for meeting the new water quality standards, regardless of the cost. Stonington has formed a Stormwater Management Study Group to study the issue and several initiatives are currently underway including:

- a catch basin marking project in conjunction with Pine Point School;
- a feasibility study for the creation of a stormwater utility; and
- a Stormwater Management Plan and regulation administered by the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Water Quality Protection Strategies

1. Modify the Aquifer Protection Zone to allow uses according to their potential risk to water resource protection areas.
2. Require the identification, licensing, and/or removal of residential underground storage tanks.
3. Create a stormwater management plan that includes best management practices for stormwater management.
4. Investigate creating a stormwater utility to pay for compliance with NPDES Phase II guidelines.
5. Require that the “first flush of runoff be appropriately treated in terms of quality and rate of runoff.
6. Encourage site designs that minimize impervious surfaces, promote infiltration of stormwater, and reduce runoff.
7. Adopt “effective impervious coverage” requirements for commercial and industrial zones.
8. Provide vegetative buffers to wetland and watercourses to filter pollutants and protect them from direct receipt of runoff.
9. Limit the clearing and grading of sites so as to minimize the impact on natural drainage patterns.
10. Promote public education programs that address “non-point” pollution issues.

Stonington should preserve historic resources to protect community character and enhance quality of life.

National Register Historic Districts

- Mechanic Street
- Mystic Bridge
- Stonington Borough

National Historic Landmarks

- Emma C. Berry (Fishing Smack)
- Charles W. Morgan (Whaler)
- L.A. Dunton (Fishing Schooner)

National Register of Historic Places

- Capt. Nathaniel B. Palmer House
- Pequotsepos Manor (Denison Homestead),
- Thomas Stanton House (Davis Homestead)
- Sabino (Excursion Steamer)
- Stonington Lighthouse
- Borough School
- Whitehall Mansion

Preserve Historic Resources

Stonington and its residents have made important contributions to state, national and even world history. Thanks to the foresight of many residents who followed them, much of Stonington's history has been preserved in its architecture, villages and museums.

A survey of residents revealed that an overwhelming 86% feel that Stonington is doing a good job of protecting historic resources. Surprisingly, all of the preservation efforts thus far have been voluntary, as there are no controls in place to protect these historic resources. Stonington's tourist economy, and to some degree, the property values in its historic villages, are dependent upon the continued integrity of these resources.

Encourage "Sensitive Stewardship"

Owners who are emotionally and financially committed to maintaining a historic resource are the most effective means of preserving it. Sensitive stewardship should be encouraged since without it, no regulatory or incentive program can prevent the loss of historic resources due to demolition or neglect. Stonington should consider ways to provide educational programs and technical assistance for historic preservation.

Recognize Significant Historic Resources

Another way to encourage historic preservation is through recognition programs such as the National Historic Landmark program, the National Register of Historic Places, and the State Register of Historic Places.

Stonington should also consider establishing a local register of historic places to acknowledge properties of local historic significance. Such a program can be administered by local historical societies and sometimes entails voluntarily placing a small placard on historic structures to indicate the original owner and date of construction. While adding no protection to a property, it can instill pride in ownership and encourage preservation efforts.

Captain Nathaniel Palmer House



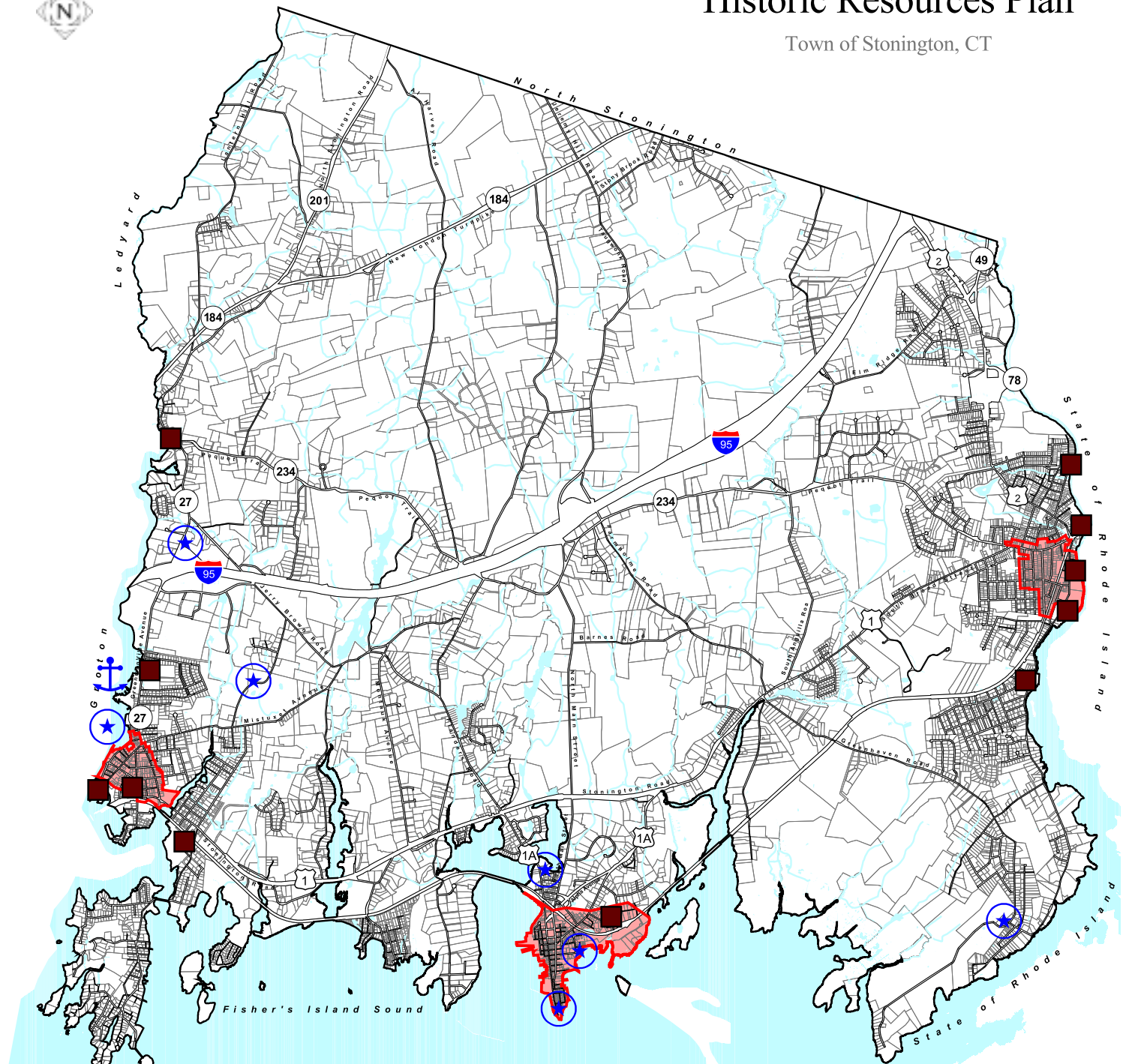
Historic Recognition Plaque









Historic Resources Plan

Town of Stonington, CT



Legend

-  National Register Historic Districts
-  National Register Historic Places
-  National Historic Landmarks
-  Historic Mill Thematic Group

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Definition of “Historic”

Various dictionaries define “historic” as anything having importance in or influence on history. National Historic Landmarks and structures on the National Register of Historic Places typically fit this definition due to the significance of these places and/or their owners in the history of the United States. The same can be said for properties of State or local significance.

In terms of other historic buildings, there is no widely accepted definition. Some jurisdictions arbitrarily define historic buildings as any building over 50 years old for the purpose of establishing a demolition delay ordinance or other historic preservation program.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation takes a broader approach asking not whether a building is historic but whether it is worth saving because of its architectural character or because it has useful life left in it.

Many buildings in Stonington fit this broader definition because their destruction and/or replacement with contemporary structures would alter the character of their properties, neighborhoods and ultimately the Town.

Establish Preservation Programs

Stonington already has three National Register Historic Districts, essentially covering the most historic portions of its two main villages and the Borough. These district designations are mostly honorary in nature but also offer tax advantages for the rehabilitation of historic commercial properties within them. Essentially, these are recognition programs, not protection programs.

Establish Local Historic Districts

In order to exercise regulatory control over the architectural integrity of historic resources, local historic districts should be established. Such districts are established by a vote of the property owners within the proposed districts. Historic District Commissions, appointed by the Board of Selectmen (BOS), would then adopt and administer regulations requiring a Certificate of Appropriateness for certain exterior improvements within each district.

While the scope of regulations may vary from district to district, the intent should be to ensure that repairs and improvements do not harm the architectural character of properties or the surrounding district. Preservation minded property owners within local historic districts often appreciate the assurance that their investment in maintaining and rehabilitating their properties is protected by the continued historic and architectural integrity of neighboring properties.

Pursue Certified Local Government Status

Once a local historic district(s) is established, Stonington would become eligible for designation as a Certified Local Government allowing a Historic District Commission(s) to apply for historic preservation grants to be used for education, historic rehabilitation and other purposes.

Establish Village Districts

Another tool for protecting the aesthetic character of historic properties is the “village district.” Adopted by the Planning & Zoning Commission (PZC), a village district is a zoning district that allows for a high degree of architectural and site design control within established villages that would otherwise be beyond their jurisdiction. A village district ensures that as properties are redeveloped or infill development occurs; it will be in character with the surrounding village.

Unlike a local historic district, village districts may be adopted unilaterally by the PZC after an application and public hearing in accordance with their established zoning procedures.

Consider Regulatory Incentives

To encourage historic preservation, regulatory incentives such as adaptive re-use provisions can be adopted by the PZC to give property owners of historic mills or other significant historic properties flexibility in re-tenanting their properties in return for making repairs that ensure the continued architectural and historic integrity of the property.

Provide Financial Incentives

The Board of Selectmen should provide economic incentives such as tax abatements for the restoration of historic resources. By deferring the tax increase on the improved value of a property, a major disincentive for making improvements is reduced. The Town ultimately benefits from both the visual improvements to properties and the eventual increases in property taxes when the properties are assessed at their new full values.

Adopt a Demolition Delay Ordinance

Another measure that should be taken by the BOS is to adopt a demolition delay ordinance that requires as much as a 90-day waiting period before historic buildings can be demolished. While not preventing the demolition of an historic building, the waiting period allows the opportunity to seek alternatives to demolition such as purchasing the property, relocating the structure(s), or at a minimum, salvaging architectural components. The Borough of Stonington already has a demolition delay ordinance in place.

Update the Historic Resources Inventory

Stonington has completed several historic resource surveys to identify clusters of architecturally and historically significant structures for inclusion in what are now three National Register Historic Districts. A more comprehensive townwide inventory should be conducted to identify all such properties so that they may be recognized for their significance, included in historic registers or possibly historic districts, and preserved through various preservation programs.

Historic Preservation Strategies

1. Establish local historic districts that require a Certificate of Appropriateness for exterior renovations in the district.
2. Establish “village districts” (by the Planning & Zoning Commission) in Mystic, Old Mystic and Pawcatuck that allow architectural review of proposals within the district.
3. Adopt a demolition delay ordinance that requires as much as a 90-day waiting period before historic buildings can be demolished.
4. Adopt regulatory incentives (such as historic overlay and/or adaptive reuse provisions in zoning regulations).
5. Provide economic incentives such as tax abatements, grants or loans for restoration of historic resources.
6. Continue to identify and recognize important historical resources through national and state recognition programs.
7. Establish a local register of historic places.
8. Encourage sensitive stewardship as the most effective means of preserving historic resources.
9. Continue to provide educational programs and technical assistance about historic preservation to historic property owners.
10. Conduct a townwide historic resources inventory.

Coastal resources contribute to Stonington's character and quality of life.

Conserve Coastal Resources

Prior to the Modern Era, many Stonington residents made their living by working the sea - a tradition that continues today in Connecticut's last remaining sizable fishing fleet. Much of Stonington's character can be attributed to its maritime legacy, and its coastal resources contribute towards resident's quality of life.

Protect Coastal Water Quality

Coastal water quality can be affected by pollution and changes in salinity due to increased freshwater runoff, which in-turn can harm coastal ecosystems and fisheries. To protect coastal water quality, Stonington should consider implementing the following:

- lowering density and/or lot area coverage in sub-watersheds proximate to tidal wetlands and coastal waters;
- requiring that the first inch of stormwater runoff from significant new development be captured, treated and discharged at lower rates; and
- adopting uniform setbacks of 75-100 feet from all tidal wetlands with provisions for minor incursions into the setback area when unavoidable.

Provide For Marinas and Water-Dependent Uses

Stonington's 22 marinas, yacht/boat clubs and boatyards are protected uses under the State Coastal Management Act. However, current zoning regulations may not be adequate to preserve such uses from non-water-dependent encroachment. To ensure the continued survival of these uses, the Planning and Zoning Commission should consider prohibiting all but ancillary, non-water-dependent uses such as parking and dining in the Marine Commercial (MC) Zone.

The PZC should also consider a new "neighborhood marine" overlay district to restrict residential uses while encouraging new and existing boating facilities in appropriate water-dependent use locations.

Protect Coastal Islands

Coastal islands provide critical habitat for a number of plants and animals. Their further development raises issues related to water quality, scenic views and the provision of public services. The PZC should consider a new Island Conservation Zone that respects existing development while restricting new development.

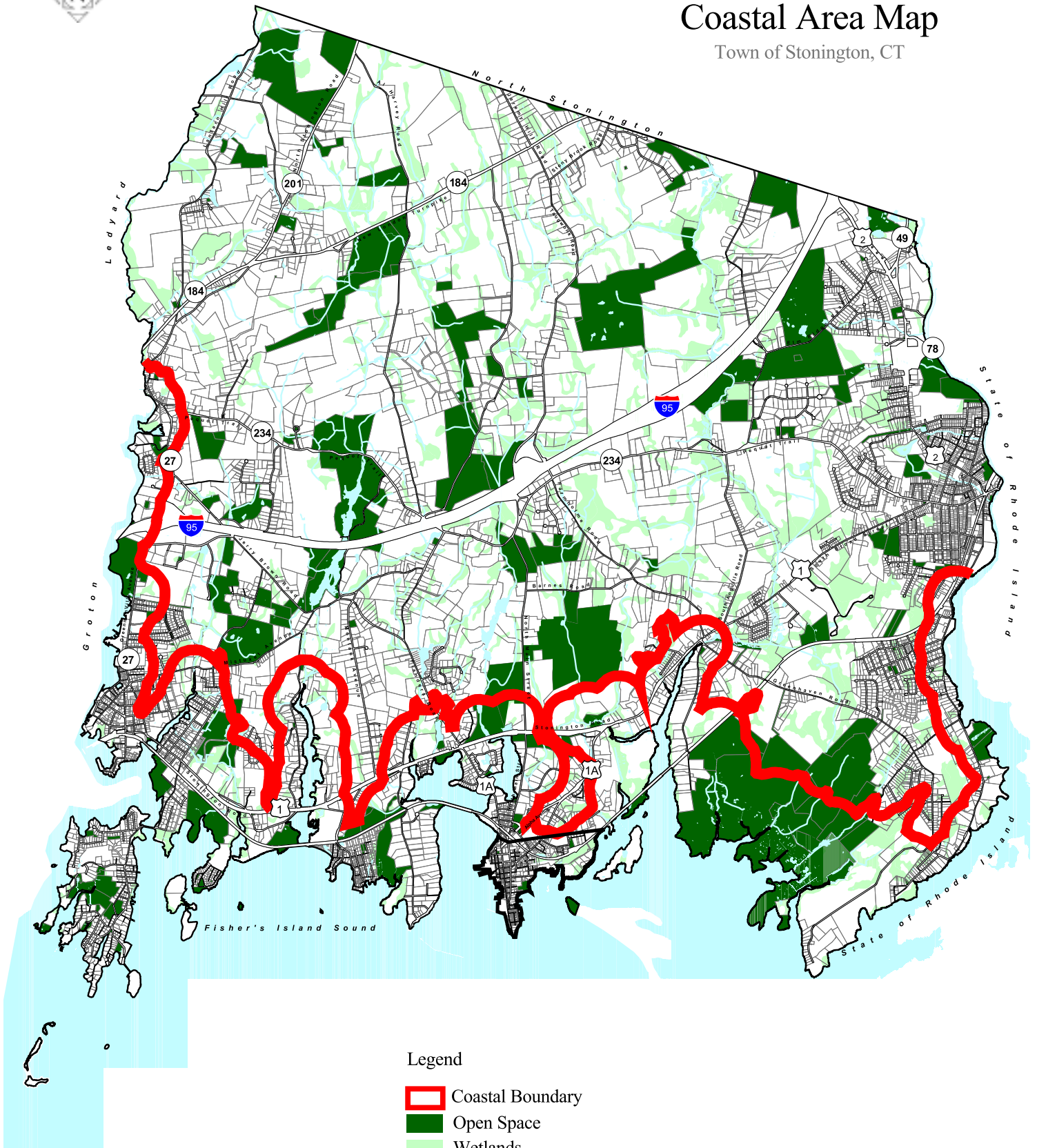
Ensure Public Access to Coastal Open Space

Coastal open space can protect important resources and provide increased recreational opportunities. Past attempts to require public access have met with mixed results due to confusing signage and difficulty in finding access points. The Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) should adopt a uniform public access sign program and require appropriate public access signage as a condition of approval for coastal site plan reviews, when public access is required.








Coastal Area Map

Town of Stonington, CT



Legend

-  Coastal Boundary
-  Open Space
-  Wetlands
-  Water and Watercourses
-  Stonington Borough

0 4000 Feet



Planimetrics
31 Bridge Street, Avon, CT 06001 800-637-5267

And the survey says...

- 63% of residents agree that the Town should acquire coastal open space for a Town beach.
- 62% agree that there should be more public access to coastal open space.
- 82% agree that the Town should restrict development in sensitive coastal areas.

Coastal Agencies

As many as six agencies are responsible for regulating activities in coastal areas.

The Mystic Harbor Management Commission plans for the management of Mystic River Harbor resources.

The Pawcatuck River Harbor Management Commission manages Pawcatuck River Harbor Resources but has not adopted a Harbor Management Plan.

The Planning and Zoning Commission regulates land and water dependent uses in the Town.

The Stonington Borough Planning and Zoning Commission regulates land and water dependent uses in the Borough.

The Shellfish Commission manages shellfish resources in Stonington waters.

Stonington Harbor Management Commission plans for the management of Stonington Harbor resources.

The Waterfront Commission manages Town owned waterfront properties.

Restrict Development in Coastal High Hazard (V) Flood Zones

Development in Coastal High Hazard Flood (V) Zones creates hazards to life and property and elevated structures designed to mitigate these hazards can result in negative visual impacts and impair landward property values. To reduce these threats to life and property, Stonington should adopt setbacks from V Zones for all non-water dependent uses, discourage the extension of sewers, and restrict densities and/or lot coverage in extensive V Zone areas.

Coordinate Coastal and Harbor Management Efforts

Coastal activities are regulated by six or more agencies with varying, often overlapping jurisdictions. To ensure that development plans for projects on or contiguous to harbors comply with all applicable plans and regulations, a uniform referral process should be established between the PZC and the many agencies with jurisdiction over coastal waters so that they may all review, provide comment and where applicable, approve applications in a timely manner. Marina development proposals should be reviewed jointly to ensure that upland elements are adequate to support water-based activities.

Confusing Coastal Access Signage



Water Dependent Uses



Coastal Resource Protection Strategies

1. Lower density and/or lot area coverage in undeveloped areas of sub-watersheds proximate to tidal wetlands and coastal waters.
2. For significant new development, require that the first inch of runoff be captured, treated and discharged slowly at lower rates.
3. Adopt additional management buffer areas adjacent to regulated wetlands.
4. Adopt uniform setbacks of 75-100 feet from all tidal wetlands with provisions for necessary minor incursions into the setback area
5. Prohibit all but ancillary, non-water dependent uses in MC-80 zone.
6. Create a “neighborhood marine” overlay district to restrict residential uses while encouraging new and existing boating facilities in appropriate water dependent use locations.
7. Consider creating an “Island Conservation” Zone.
8. Prioritize open space acquisitions based on critical resource protection and recreational potential.
9. Identify and take a proactive approach to acquiring beach property for public use through land acquisition or donation, if and when available.
10. Require appropriate public access signage as a condition of coastal site plan review approval when public access is required.
11. Create setbacks from V Zones for all non-water dependent uses.
12. Restrict densities and coverage in extensive V Zone areas
13. Foster better cooperation between the PZC, Harbor Commissions and other agencies responsible for coastal management.
14. Review marina development proposals jointly to ensure that upland elements are adequate to support water-based activity.

Coastal Wildlife



Maritime Heritage



Scenic resources contribute to Stonington's character and quality of life.

Preserve Scenic Resources

Stonington is fortunate to possess an exceptional combination of natural and man-made scenic character that is the envy of most towns in Connecticut. From its picturesque coastline to its pastoral uplands and from its quaint historic sea-side villages to its stone-walled scenic roads, Stonington's scenic beauty has attracted tourists and residents for generations and is a major component of the Town's overall community character.

Like natural, historic and coastal resources, if not adequately protected, these scenic resources can be lost. Stonington residents agree and feel that the Town should do more to protect these important resources. Nearly three-quarters of Stonington residents surveyed agreed that Stonington should do more to protect scenic resources.

Protect Scenic Areas and Vistas

Scenic resources can be grouped into two main categories: vistas that offer distant scenic views and scenic areas that may offer scenic views from within as well as from afar.

Scenic vistas abound in Stonington. Much of Stonington's coastline offers scenic coastal vistas but the majority of it is privately owned. The general public is still able to enjoy many glimpses from various roads while locations such as Stonington Point and Barn Island offer the public expansive coastal views. Stonington's gently rolling uplands do not offer many vistas but there are occasional expansive views across pastures and water bodies such as the Mystic Reservoir. Some of these vistas have been identified on the plan on the following page.

Scenic areas include such areas as Barn Island and Mystic Seaport as well as significant portions of Mystic, Pawcatuck and Stonington Borough. The latter derive their scenic character from a combination of natural and historic elements.

The Conservation Commission is conducting a more thorough inventory of scenic resources. If their work is completed prior to adoption of this plan, it will be incorporated into the Scenic Resource Plan.

Preserve Undeveloped Land As Long As Possible

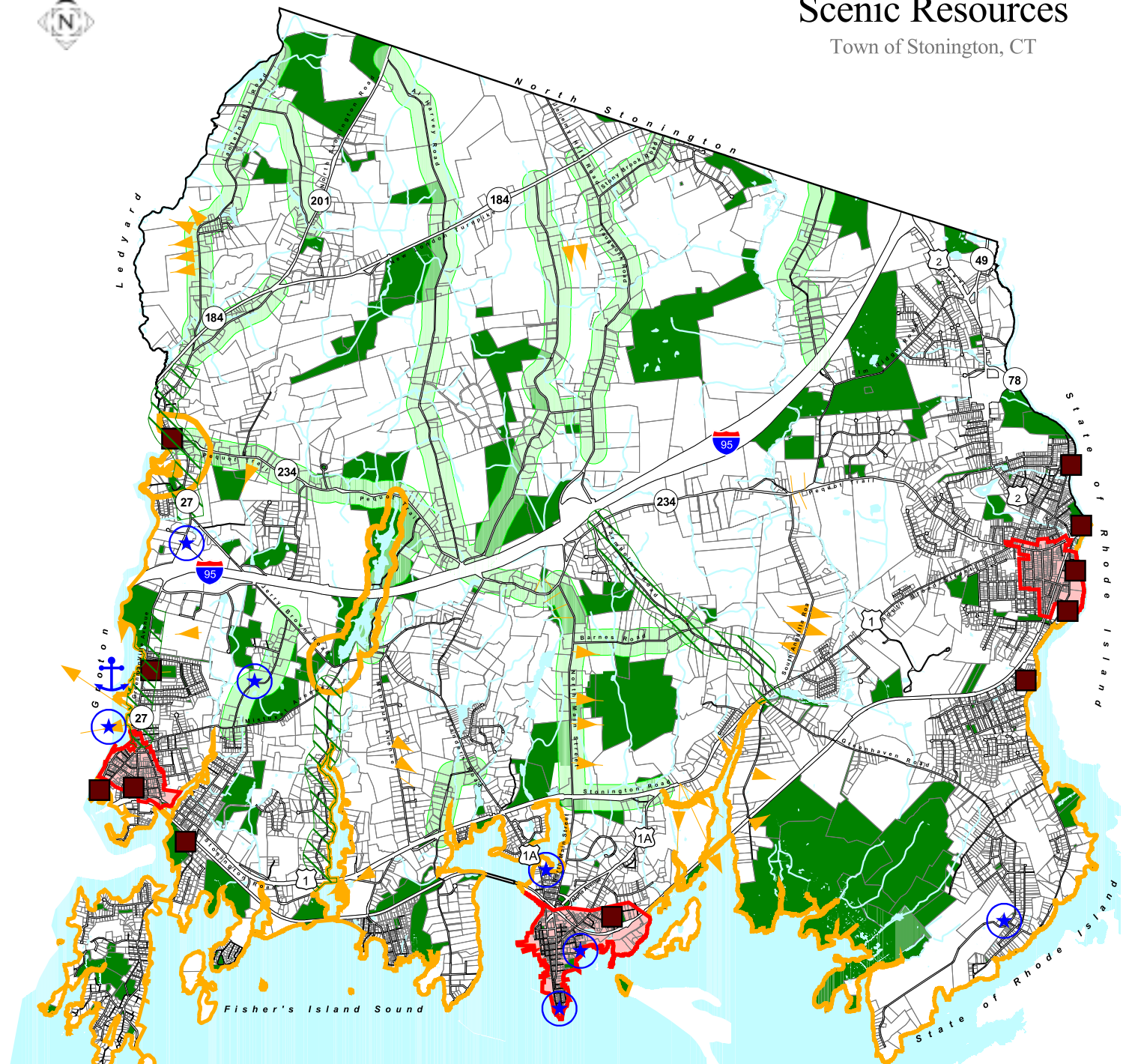
Undeveloped land contributes to the overall character and quality of life in Stonington. Such land should be preserved for as long as possible.

Public Act 490 (a program where property is assessed based on use, not value) can be effective in reducing the cost of owning undeveloped land. This program would allow the Town to reduce property taxes on farmland, forest and open space in return for not developing the land for a ten-year period. If the land is developed during the ten-year time frame, a recapture provision allows the Town to recoup a prorated share of the taxes that would have otherwise been paid without the tax reduction.



Scenic Resources

Town of Stonington, CT



Legend

- Scenic Views
- Scenic Areas
- National Register Historic Districts
- Scenic Roads
- Proposed Scenic Roads
- Open Space
- Mills
- National Historic Landmarks
- National Register of Historic Places
- Water

0 4000 Feet

Protect Scenic Roads

Stonington has a wealth of scenic roads throughout Town, lined with stone walls, majestic trees and offering pastoral views.

Many of these roads have been designated as scenic by both the State and Town, offering a degree of protection by limiting road improvements that might alter their scenic character. Unfortunately, many of the elements that make the roads scenic often lie beyond the road or right-of way. Stone walls, significant canopy trees, rustic barns and scenic meadows are typically beyond the reach of state and local scenic road regulations, requiring a second level of protection.

More than two-thirds of residents surveyed agreed that the Town should do more to protect scenic road features such as stone walls, street trees and barns.

As development threatens the character of these roads, consideration should be given to protecting scenic elements through conservation easements or open space acquisition: limiting the disturbance of stone walls, street trees, and other scenic features, while pushing development away from road. The Scenic Road Ordinance should be modified if necessary to improve scenic road protection.

Utility maintenance is another major threat to scenic roads as utility companies and their contractors disfigure street trees for the sake of electrical or telephone reliability. While a noble effort, such maintenance does not always have to be so destructive to scenic character. The Town's Tree-Warden (the First Selectman or his/her designee) can intervene and work cooperatively with the utility companies to limit pruning to the extent necessary to maintain reliability.

Scenic Resource Protection Strategies

1. Inventory scenic resources and establish policies and regulations to protect them.
2. As scenic roadsides are developed, preserve scenic elements through conservation easements or open space set-asides.
3. Modify the Scenic Road Ordinance if necessary.
4. Consider expanding the PA. 490 open space program.
5. Work with utility companies to preserve scenic streetscapes.

Scenic View



Scenic Road

